

## **Exploring affiliation in the reception of conversational complaint stories**

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This chapter investigates the linguistic resources deployed by recipients of conversational complaint stories to show affiliation (or not) with the teller, affiliation being understood as the display of support and endorsement for a conveyed affective stance, here typically anger and/or indignation. Among the verbal means for affiliative reception are claims of understanding, congruent negative assessments and by-proxy justifications, while factual follow-up questions, minimal responses and withholdings are shown to be non-affiliative. As a rule, affiliative verbal devices are accompanied by prosodic matching or upgrading, while non-affiliative ones have prosodic downgrading. The affiliative import of response cries is shown to depend even more heavily on prosodic matching or upgrading, although the transitoriness of prosody makes verbal reinforcement a desideratum. All in all, the discussion paints a complex picture of what it takes to come across as affiliative in response to a conversational complaint story, but one not lacking in systematicity.

### **1. On story reception in conversation**

#### *1.1 Affiliation vs. alignment*

In a recent contribution to the literature on conversational storytelling, Stivers (2008) distinguishes two types of story reception: **alignment** and **affiliation**. **Alignment** involves supporting the asymmetric distribution of roles which characterizes the storytelling activity: e.g., positioning oneself as story recipient and refraining from

coming in while the telling is in progress. Mis-aligning involves, e.g., competing for the floor during the telling or failing to treat a story as in progress or, on its completion, as over. Alignment is thus a structural dimension of the activity of story reception. It can be achieved among other things through the use of vocal continuers (*mm hm, uh huh* and *yeah*) during story production.

**Affiliation**, on the other hand, is a social dimension in story reception. Stivers describes it as “the hearer displays support of and endorses the teller’s conveyed stance” (2008: 35), *stance* being understood as “the teller’s affective treatment of the events he or she is describing” (2008: 37). How do storytellers convey stance? For one, story *prefaces* (e.g., *something very very cute happened last night* or *I’m broiling about something*) inform recipients about the sort of response which the teller is seeking on story completion (Sacks 1974). But stance can also be conveyed through *prosody*, e.g., in reported speech (Couper-Kuhlen 1999, Günthner 1999), and through various forms of *embodiment* (Niemelä 2010, Goodwin et al this volume). Furthermore, the (sequential) *context* of the telling can offer clues; for instance, in a medical visit a telling is likely to be conveying a trouble or problem (Stivers 2008). It is through resources such as these that story recipients are provided with access to the teller’s stance.

*Affiliation* is generally agreed to be the preferred response in storytelling. Stivers argues that it is achieved by “the provision of a stance toward the telling that mirrors the stance that the teller conveys having (...) whether that is as funny, sad, fabulous, or strange” (2008:33). Stance mirroring can be done, according to Stivers, through assessments (*That’s fantastic*) and other full-turn responses (*I see*), but also – at least in mid-telling position – through head nods. On story completion, by contrast, simple head

nods do not provide sufficient affiliation, while assessments and congruent second stories do.

One of Stivers' most important findings in this study is that a single resource, the head nod, can be affiliative during the telling of a story but can display a lack of affiliation upon its completion. This is intriguing because it suggests that response types are not intrinsically affiliative or non-affiliative; instead, what counts as affiliative depends crucially on *where* the response is placed in the sequential/interactional context. The present chapter explores further resources which are either affiliative or non-affiliative at particular locations in storytelling, here specifically at climaxes and high points in conversational complaint stories.<sup>1</sup>

Complaint stories as a rule concern some (non-present) third party whose behavior (often towards the teller) is perceived as blameworthy. They are typically produced in order to account for why that person's behavior should be considered morally reprehensible (Drew 1998) but also serve a primordial impulse to share experienced feelings. Many complaint stories are prefaced in ways which project that the teller was angry/mad/annoyed/aggravated by the behavior in question: *I was so upset, I'm so mad at that painter, well I really was cross, I'm broiling about something, I don't know what there is about it that annoys you.* In addition to reconstructing their aggravation and the motivation for it in the story world, tellers may also make *in situ* displays of anger and indignation in the here-and-now. This study now asks the following questions: (1) When affect-laden displays of anger/indignation/annoyance – be they reconstructed or in situ – are made in the course of a complaint story, what kinds of uptake count as affiliative? (2)

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<sup>1</sup> The research has been carried out in conjunction with the project “Emotive involvement in conversational storytelling”, funded by the Cluster of Excellence “Languages of Emotion” at the Free University in Berlin, Germany. See also Selting (2010).

What kinds of response count as non-affiliative in these contexts? The focus will be on verbal (lexico-syntactic) and vocal (prosodic-phonetic) resources, with visible (gestural-kinesic) dimensions being taken into consideration where relevant. The data base is a collection of 36 strong displays of affect, as a rule by the teller, in 15 different British and American complaint story episodes, nine taken from audio recordings of everyday telephone conversation and six from video recordings of face-to-face conversation. The results are intended to cast light on the recipient's task in storytelling: How to come across as affiliative, or non-affiliative as the case may be, in the given context?

### *1.2 Distinguishing affiliative from non-affiliative reception*

Storytellers have a vested interest in knowing whether their recipients are affiliating with the story as told and the stances as conveyed. This information is crucial not only for assessing the emotional resonance they are achieving but also, quite mundanely, for determining what to do next. As Jefferson's (1978, 1988) work has shown, storytellers make different next moves depending on how their stories are being received. This provides their recipients (and us analysts) with important clues concerning the emergent interaction. In particular, what the teller does next after points in the story where responses have been made relevant equips analysts with a ready tool for determining whether these responses were taken by participants to be affiliative or non-affiliative.

To see how storytellers' next actions reflect recipients' behavior, let us compare the sequential development of two episodes involving complaint stories. The first is organized around a story told by Lesley to her friend Joyce on the telephone. With this

story she is ‘letting off steam’ about the behavior of a mutual acquaintance, referred to as Mr R, whom she accidentally ran into at a vicarage sale:<sup>2</sup>

(1) “Something for nothing”<sup>3</sup> (Holt: Christmas 1985: Call 4)

01 Les: oh:;  
02→ hh y- uhm you ↓know i=i i'm BROILING about something;  
03 heh° [heh°]  
04 Joy: [WH ]A::T;  
05 Les: well thA:t ↓SA:LE. (0.2)  
06 at\_at (.) the VICarage;  
07 (0.6)  
08 Joy: oh ↓ye[s:,  
09 Les: [t  
10 (0.6)  
11 Les: u (.) yOur friend\_n\_MI:NE was the:re,  
12 (0.2)  
13 ( ): (h[h hh)  
14 Les: [mister: R:,  
15 Joy: oh (ye:s XXX)  
16 (0.4)  
17 Les: and em:  
18 <<p> ↑we (.) ↑rEally didn't have a lot of CHA:NGE that (.) day,  
19 because we'd BEEN to ↓bAth;  
20 and we'd BEEN: chrIstmas shOppin:g,  
21 (0.5)  
22 Les: but we thOUght we'd bEtter go along to the SALE;  
23 and dO what we COULD;  
24 (0.2)  
25 Les: we hAd↑n't got a lOt (.) of e? rEady cash to ↑SPE:ND.  
26 (0.3)  
27 Les: t[ hh  
28 Joy: [mh;  
29 Les: in ANY case we thought the thIngs were vERY ex^PENsive;  
30 Joy: oh DID you;  
31 (0.9)  
32 Les: And uh ↑we were lOoking round the ↓STA:LLS;  
33 and poking aBOUT;  
34 and hE came UPto me,  
35 and he said;  
36→ Oh:, <<aspirated> H>ELlo lEsley,(.)  
37→ <<h> stIll trying to bUy something for NOTHING,>  
38 Joy: ((click)) °HAH::  
39 (0.8)  
40 Joy: OO[:: (lesley) ]  
41 Les: [↑OO: ehH heh ↑heh]  
42 (0.2)  
43 Joy: ↓i:s [n't ] [↓he

<sup>2</sup> See also Drew 1998 and Heritage (forthc.), who deal with the same story from slightly different perspectives.

<sup>3</sup> This and all further transcripts are rendered in GAT 2 (Selting et al, forthc.) in order to give a more systematic representation of prosody.

44→ Les: <<f,h> [↑what] dO ↑y[ou !↑SA:Y!..>  
45 (0.3)  
46 Joy: <<p> ↓oh isn't hE ↓DREA:Dful;>  
47 Les: <<pp, h> YE:S,>  
48 (0.6)  
49 ( ): <<p> ((click))>  
50 Joy: what\_n AW::ful MA::[N;]  
51 Les: [eh ] heh heh ↑heh  
52 Joy: OH:: hOnestly;  
53 I cannot stAnd the mAn;  
54 it's just [(XXX XXX)]  
55→ Les: [i thOUght] well i'm gonna tell JOYCE thAt;  
56 eh[h eh ]  
57 Joy: [( ) ]  
58 Les: =[heh-heh he-e] uh: ↑e[h eh hhhhh ]  
59 Joy: =[OH::; ] i [i DO think he]'s DREADful;  
60 Les: <<pp> ((click))> OH: dEar;  
61 Joy: OH: he r[eally (i):s;)  
62 Les: [↑he dra? ]  
63→ he (.) took the WIND out of my sails compLETEL(h)y;  
64 (.)  
65 Joy: i KNOW;  
66 the (AWKward/AWful) thing is you've never got a rEady A:NS[wer;  
67 Les: [no:  
68 Joy: have ↓you. that's ri:ght; ]  
69 Les: i thought of lots of ready a]nswers A:Fterward[s;]  
70 Joy: [ye]s thAt's RI::GHT;=  
71 Les: =yE:s-  
72 (.)  
73 Joy: but you can nEver think of them at the TI:[ME.  
74 Les: [nO: [NO; ]  
.  
.  
.  
((talk about ready answers continues))

Where is the teller's stance conveyed in this story? Where are affiliative responses made relevant? Importantly, Lesley's stance is foreshadowed here in the story preface, *I'm broiling about something* (line 2).<sup>4</sup> This preface alerts her recipient, as the story unfolds, to a turning point that could have motivated Lesley's anger. That turning point, as it transpires, is Mr R's remark to her at the vicarage sale: *oh:, hello Lesley, (.) still trying to buy something for nothing*, (lines 36-37). Here then is a climactic point in the story with a displayed affective dimension, making an affect-related recipient response relevant next.

<sup>4</sup> The use of *something*, a prospective indexical (Goodwin 1996), is cleverly chosen here to encourage Joyce to ask *what* (line 4), thereby making the story appear solicited rather than volunteered.

In Heritage's (forthc.) terminology, it constitutes an 'empathic moment', a point in time when recipients are under some moral obligation to affiliate empathically.<sup>5</sup>

How is Lesley's stance made accessible here? For one, she performs the encounter as a dramatic scene, enacting the voices of the *dramatis personae* with reported speech and thought and thereby enabling an overlay of her own voice to display her evaluation (see also Günthner 1999). The antagonist Mr R's remark is delivered as an oxymoron and cast as an unanswerable question (line 37). This converts a potentially innocent greeting into an occasion of verbal aggression. Mr R's voice is animated with hyperarticulation and a sharp, spikey voice quality, symbolic of the stabs it is portrayed to be making against Lesley's character. Such rhetorical and prosodic devices add heightened emotive involvement to the climactic moment by embodying Lesley's (reconstructed) anger at her aggressor. Joyce responds by producing an initial click followed by a sharp inbreath (line 38), suggestive of sudden shock. After a short pause, she continues with *oo:: Lesley* (line 40) and then an exclamation, *i:sn't he* (line 43), discontinued when Lesley now comes in.<sup>6</sup>

The teller's next turn is a high-pitched, emphatic *what do you sa:y* (line 44). With this turn, Lesley evaluates the climactic event in a here-and-now perspective. At the same time, her turn elevates the specific situation being reported to a more general level: 'what does one say when these things happen?' This turn is also heavily marked for affect through its exceptionally high pitch and peaked contours (see Fig. 8 below), affording another opportunity for Joyce to respond affiliatively, which she now does in three

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<sup>5</sup> Following Heritage, forthc. an empathic response is "an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and that is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel" (Eisenberg and Fabes 1990).

<sup>6</sup> After a brief pause, Joyce subsequently recycles this turn to *oh isn't he drea:dful* (line 46).

separate turns: *oh isn't he drea:dful*. (line 46), *what\_n aw::ful ma::n*; (line 50) and *oh:: honestly; I cannot stand the man*; (line 52f).<sup>7</sup> At this point Lesley moves to exit the storytelling episode with *I thought well i'm gonna tell Joyce that*; (line 55). After further displays of empathy from Joyce, the episode is brought to a close with an idiom *he (.) took the wind out of my sails completel(h)y* (line 63) (see also Drew & Holt 1998), whereupon turn-by-turn talk, here concerning ready answers, resumes.

All in all, the story in (1) is a neatly circumscribed package consisting of preface (line 2), setting (lines 5-6, 11 + 14), background (lines 18-29), precipitating events (line 32-36), climax (line 37) and here-and-now evaluation (line 44).<sup>8</sup> Following multiple affiliative responses from the recipient, the storytelling exit is accomplished in an orderly fashion. All of this suggests a relatively unproblematic trajectory, one that appears all the more unproblematic when compared to the next example, where a complaint story goes awry. The following fragment comes from a face-to-face conversation in which Jessica is telling her two flatmates, Tricia and Bridget, about a long-distance phone call she had the day before with her boyfriend Andy.

**(2) "Goodbye to Andy" (Housemates\_Boulder\_1997)<sup>9</sup>**

01 BRI: <<all> so have you talked to ANDy lately?>  
 02 (0.6)  
 03 JES: <<h> mHM,>  
 04 tAlked to him YESTerday.  
 05 (1.6)  
 06 BRI: REALly?  
 07 (0.5)

<sup>7</sup> Heritage's (forthc.) analysis of this episode spots a moment of divergence in the basis of Joyce's empathy when she assesses Mr R as a person on independent grounds rather than in terms of his behavior (Lesley's grounds). He suggests that "independently accessible aspects of a scene are often preferred by an empathizer, who wishes emphatic affiliation to transcend the particulars of a report, and escape into independent agreement that is not mere responsive to the reports' details alone" (forthc., 23).

<sup>8</sup> The story is thus also remarkable in being a schoolbook example of oral narrative structure (see, e.g., Labov 1972). Not all conversational stories are as tightly structured; this is because, in Jefferson's words, they are "sequenced objects articulating with the particular context in which they are told" (1978: 219).

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Barbara A. Fox for providing me with access to these data.



08 BRI: [how was THAT.  
09 JES: [YEAH;  
10→ JES: it was GOOD;  
11→ but then-  
12 (1.5) uh::  
13 i kInd of like(0.2)drEw: out the goodBYE: for a lOng time,  
14 (0.5)  
15 JES: <<p> and I was like>  
16 ((clears throat))  
17 (0.7)  
18 TRI: n hn hn  
19 (0.4)  
20 JES: <<p i was like> <<h, stylized> O:KAY::;  
21 |swEEt DREAMS;  
22 |((gazes at Tricia))  
22 he's like OKAY- yOU TOO- =>  
23 =i'm like (0.7)  
24 <<h, stylized> |talk to you SOON:,>  
24 |((gazes at Bridget))  
25 BRI: | [heh  
25 |((slight smile))  
26 JES: [he's like (0.4) <<f, stylized> OKAY::;>  
27 and i'm like (0.7) mhm <<f, stylized> i LOVE you:=>  
28 =he's like i love you <<f, stylized> TOO:>  
29 and THEN- (0.3)  
30 |i'm like <<h, f, stylized> see(h) ya(h) LA(h)ter;>  
30 |((smiling))  
31→ he goes ↑Okay;  
32→ and he just |hangs UP.  
32→ |((hand gesture of hanging up))  
33 (0.2) .h (0.1)  
34→ and<sup>2</sup> (0.2) <sup>2</sup>I [we hadn't said |↑↓!BYE:! yet.  
34→ |((eyebrow flash))  
34→ |((gazes at Bridget, then Tricia))  
35 TRI: [O::H::;  
36 BRI: ↑↓O | [H::;  
37 TRI: | [↑↓MM::;  
37 |((brief exchange of glances between Bridget and Tricia))  
38 (0.6)  
39→ JES: it's ↑rEAlly COMMon to be like;  
40 <<sung> |da↑↑DA:da;da↑DA:da;daDA::dada>  
40 |((weaving hand and head back and forth))  
41 BYE;=  
42 =BYE.  
43 (0.7)  
44→ JES: |RIGHT? (0.3)  
44→ |((gazes at Tricia))  
45 <<p, l> CLICK.>  
46 (0.7)  
47→ JES: and sO: he<sup>2</sup>  
48 i'm like <<h, stylized> see you LAters;>  
49 (0.4)  
50 JES: |i said <<h, stylized> see ya LAter;>=  
50 |((hand raised in telephone gesture))  
51 =he's like <<h, stylized> MHM->



33).<sup>10</sup> So she clarifies the problem in what is cleverly designed as a turn extension with 'and': *and<sup>p</sup> (0.2) ?I we hadn't said bye: yet* (line 34). This line is delivered with unmistakable signs of heightened emotive involvement: the word *bye* has a strong rising-falling pitch accent and is accompanied by an eyebrow flash. At the same time Jessica gazes first at Bridget and then at Tricia, as if to elicit a response.

Bridget and Tricia briefly exchange glances now and respond in a subdued fashion with *oh::* and *mm::* (lines 36-37).<sup>11</sup> Yet unlike Lesley in (1), Jessica does not now provide an affect-laden evaluation of the point of her story. Instead she treats her recipients as not having understood the point, giving a matter-of-fact explanation of the norm in telephone closings (lines 38-45) and then re-cycling the climax of the story (lines 47-56). The second version of the climax contains an even more dramatic performance of Andy's hanging up and her emotive reaction to it: *!hey:!* visibly directed at Andy through the telephone receiver with an angry voice and face. But rather than provide a sign of empathy, Bridget rather prosaically inquires what happened next: *did you call him back?* (line 57), implying that if the phone call was abruptly ended, the logical thing to do would be to re-establish the connection.

Jessica now adds another story component (not shown here), detailing what happened when she called Andy back. This story component also receives little uptake, whereupon Jessica provides even more explanation and engages in further pursuit of response from her recipients. She finally launches the story exit by enacting her parting remark to Andy, performed now with vocal, facial and gestural cues displaying not anger, but sadness and resignation: *I was like we're really far away::; it's important, to b have like nice (0.8) closure. on the phone* (lines 95-97). Her recipients, however, remain immune to this renewed display of

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<sup>10</sup> Tricia's *o::h* in line 35 is arguably a response to line 32 but it is noticeably delayed.

<sup>11</sup> In section 4 below, I return to a more precise analysis of how these tokens are produced and what their affiliative import is.

affect: Tricia gazes down and echoes the word *closure* under her breath, Bridget nods and then produces an agreeing *it is*, which because of its delay comes off as somewhat pro-forma (lines 99-100).

The trajectory that the complaint story in (2) takes is thus strikingly different from that in (1). First, the storytelling episode itself (from story preface to story exit) is almost twice as long as that in (1). Second, following the climax, the teller in (2) does not move into an affect-laden evaluation of the point but rather into (i) an explanation and re-cycling of the climax, (ii) a story expansion and then (iii) more explanation and pursuit of response. With the story exit in (2) there is a shift from a display of anger to one of sadness and resignation, yet this new stance does not receive support or endorsement from the recipients either. Compared to the unremarkable development of the storytelling episode in (1), the trajectory in (2) is convoluted and indicative of problematic story reception. In fact, approximately ten minutes after the fragment shown in (2), Jessica complains to her flatmates about their behavior during her talk about Andy.<sup>12</sup>

In the following I propose to use the teller's behavior subsequent to affect-laden displays of stance (typically at story climaxes and thereafter) as a gauge in determining which kinds of recipient behavior are perceived to be affiliative and which non-affiliative in the aftermath of conversational complaint stories. As an even cursory comparison of the recipient responses in (1) and (2) will show, there is no simple answer to the question of what counts as affiliative reception in conversational complaint stories. Whereas a change-of-state token such as *oh* might be thought more indicative of a supportive stance than, say, the avoidance of words altogether, it is significant that the purely non-verbal click and inbreath in line 38 of (1) are

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, she makes lack of alignment (*I didn't have your full attention*) rather than lack of affiliation the grounds for complaint.

more affiliative than the *oh* in line 36 of (2), judging from the trajectory that each storytelling episode takes.

## 2. Affiliative responses

### 2.1 Verbal devices

What counts as an affiliative response to a teller's display of anger and indignation in a conversational complaint story? The following fragment from a telephone conversation between two friends, Dinah and Bea, is instructive in this respect. Dinah's story concerns a mutual friend, Marty, who is a compulsive money borrower:

#### (3) "Money borrower" (SBL 1:1:11)

01 Din: ( ) er: gets me PAI:D.  
 02 i don't [knO:w i]h(h)aven' GOT it yet. =  
 03 Bea: [ah hah ]  
 04 Din: but at lea:st she SAID something about i[t.  
 05 Bea: [oh: uh HU:H,  
 06 (0.3)  
 07 Bea: y(h)eah th(h)at m(h)akes you feel EA:sie(h)r. hh[h hh  
 08 Din: [WE:LL  
 09 i[: wasn'  
 10 Bea: [( )  
 11 (.)  
 12 Din: wasn't worried about the fI:ve ↑DOLLars;=  
 13 =only<sup>2</sup> ↑i do[n't know what there i]:s a;b(h)Out it that  
 14 Bea: [I: know what ]  
 15 (0.2)  
 16 Din: ^an!NOYS! you: to think that=  
 17 Bea: =well that's what I MEA:N.  
 18 it isn't the (.) MONey as[much as ]  
 19 Din: [no MONey doe:s] didn't mean  
 anything,  
 20 or i'd do it for ^MARTy only.  
 21 ((creak)) it's: it's jUst this: uh:: (0.7)  
 22 °h ↑you KNO:W,=now for instance wu<sup>2</sup> she: used to BORrow from  
 23 me;=  
 24 =she borrowed TWICE (.) from me once;  
 25 Bea: uh\_HUH  
 26 Din: °h an:: (.) pf° (0.3)  
 27 oh i was sitting in her HOU:SE,  
 28 'n: re:j oakley came\_n de↑LIVERED something.  
 29 an\_she: w °h said she didn't hAve the CHA:NGE;  
 30 would i loan her the money to PAY him;  
 31 an\_she'd pay me LATER;;

32 an\_i: said well you already BORrowed from me twice:,  
 33 an\_never offered to PA:Y,  
 34 Bea: uh\_HUH[: ]  
 35 Din: [°h ]and ↑shE prodU:ced money (.) enou:gh to pa:y rej  
 oakley and me !BO:TH!.  
 36→ Bea: °h (.) uh i: !↑KNO:W!;  
 37→ there's it's a !↑QUI:RK:!  
 38→ there's SOMETHing the:re,  
 40 Din: becuz she <<h> she did  
 41 it ↑WASN'T becuz she'd> have n:Eeded to borrow the money  
 from mE:.,  
 42 Bea: mh<sup>2</sup>\_hm<sup>2</sup>,  
 43 (0.6)  
 44 Bea: mh\_[hm ]  
 45 Din: [I ↑don]'t know ↑WHAT it <<creaky> i:s,>>  
 46 (.)  
 47 Bea: i don't Either;  
 48 (0.2)  
 49 Din: but <<ceaky> it's it so it> jus:t left you kind\_of feeling  
 FUNny,  
 50 no:t that (.) it (.) rEa:lly made any DIFfere:nce,  
 51 so i\_d\_v in↓VI:ted her\_n tAken her;  
 52 n\_d °h would have thought NOTHING of it;  
 53 Bea: hm\_[MH

This story is triggered by talk about a loan that Dinah has apparently made to Marty but which is still outstanding. Bea responds to Dinah's implicit complaint (lines 2, 4) by suggesting that if Marty has mentioned it, Dinah can feel more confident about getting the money back (line 7). Dinah, however, resists the implication that she is worried about the money (lines 8-9, 12). Instead, she remarks with reference to their friend's behavior *I don't know what there i:s ab(h)out it that (0.2) an!noys! you:* (lines 13, 16). After Bea now insists that that was what she meant (lines 17-18), Dinah proceeds to tell an exemplifying story, whose climax is *and she produ:ced money (.) enou:gh to pa:y Rej Oakley and me !bo:th!* (line 35). Bea's response to this is to say: *I: !kno:w!* (line 37).

Interestingly, the phrase *I know* in this context does not mean that Bea knows Dinah's story, but rather that she recognizes the type of situation Dinah is talking about. In other words, Bea is claiming to *understand* Dinah's objection to their friend's egregious behavior. Understanding is, in Goffman's words, not merely a matter of cognition: "To quickly

appreciate another's circumstances (it seems) is to be able to place ourselves in them empathetically" (1978: 798).<sup>13</sup> Claims of understanding are then one way to mark affiliation with a storyteller's displayed stance of anger and/or indignation.

But Bea not only claims to understand, she now goes on to show, or exhibit this understanding (Sacks 1992/1995: 1122) by offering assessments that are congruent with Dinah's implied stance towards their friend's behavior: *there's u- it's a !qui:rk!* (line 37) and *there's something the:re* (line 38). Although not intrinsically negative, these qualifying descriptions, in the context of a complaint story and in the co-text of *I know*, are heard as assessments with negative overtones – and thus as agreeing with the teller's implied negative stance towards their friend's behavior. Because they generalize from the reported event to other, similar occasions, Bea's assessments are furthermore heard as documenting an independent epistemic position (Heritage & Raymond 2005), which in this context increases her implied support of Dinah's negative stance.

If stance-congruent assessments from an independent epistemic position are a second way to demonstrate understanding and thereby signal affiliation with a teller's angry or indignant stance, a third is to formulate, by proxy, a motivation for it. This is what happens in the following episode, extracted from another telephone conversation between Lesley and her friend Joyce. In this episode, Joyce is complaining to Lesley about a mutual acquaintance, Nancy, who has volunteered her au-pair to help out at a charity event but then at the last minute asked Joyce to do it instead:

**(4) “Like dirt” (Holt Oct 1988:1:8)**

42      Joy:      but THEN: you see:,  
43                    at the LAST minute;

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<sup>13</sup> See also Ruusuvuori 2005, who conceptualizes empathy as a state of mind in which the empathizing person *understands* the other's experience.

44 she SUddenly thought-  
 45 well she's a BIT inexpErienced;=and °h  
 46 she said i wOndered if YOU: uhm:-  
 47 you know as you're expERienced;  
 48 could DO it; °h (.)  
 49 and i  
 50 i was <<h> sO: !CRo:SS!> les that [i ]  
 51 Les: [YES; ]  
 52 Joy: well i'm TERribly sO[rry but ]  
 53→ Les: [wE:ll YES; ] because NO:Rmally it's the sort  
 of thIng she'd a:sk you <<h> ^AN[yways:: ]:=  
 54 Joy: [exACTly;]  
 55→ Les: =uh wEeks [^beFO::RE;]>  
 56 Joy: [ex!ACT!ly; ]  
 57 Les: <<h> YE:S;> [°hh]  
 58 Joy: [and] i (.)((creak))  
 59 she said oh i DID come round to sEe you uhm:: (about)((creak))  
 60 a couple of WEEKS ago,  
 61 and i said Oh yes we were aWA:Y, °h  
 62 she said then I was away lAst week;  
 63 and sUddenly it's All On ME;  
 64 and <<acc> [this that and ] the Other,>  
 65 Les: [eh: he: he: he]  
 66 Joy: and i s\_↑well i'm TERribly sOrry;=  
 67 =al↑thOUgh i shall be cAlling IN;  
 68 i'm[: [you know i'm[( now)]  
 69 Les: [°hh[hh [oh ↑gOod][for YOU:;]  
 70 Joy: [i C ]A:N'T  
 71 Les: gOod for ↓YOU:;  
 72 Joy: ↑well what ^HONestly (.) les;  
 73 she treats us All lIke (.)↓DI:RT.

Joyce has prefaced her story with *well I really was cross*: (not shown here), so that when Lesley hears: *and I I was so: !cr:oss! Les that I (s'd) well I'm terribly so-* (lines 50, 52), Lesley can anticipate that the climax is near and that Joyce has rejected Nancy's last-minute request.<sup>14</sup> Lesley furthermore has both direct and indirect evidence of Joyce's affective stance: Joyce not only says that she was angry, she does so in a high, loud and tense voice that nearly breaks on the word *cross*. Lesley now shows her support for and endorsement of Joyce's stance by justifying it, for and on behalf of Joyce, in her next

<sup>14</sup> As it later transpires, Nancy has also called Lesley up and asked *her* to help out. So at this point Lesley already knows that Joyce has said no.



turn: *we:ll yes; because no:rmally it's the sort of thing she'd a:sk you anyways::; uh weeks befo:::re*; (lines 53, 55).

The reason that Lesley gives here is designed with a free-standing *because* clause: in syntactic terms there is no explicit main clause, either before or after, to which it could be said to be 'subordinate'. Yet on semantic/pragmatic grounds, this *because* clause can be said to be accounting for the stance that Joyce has just made accessible (see also Couper-Kuhlen, *forthc. a*).<sup>15</sup> Lesley portrays this account as something she knows independently of the incident Joyce is describing: with it she implies that she knows on her own account that Nancy's behavior is egregious and that Joyce is justified in becoming angry.<sup>16</sup> This kind of by-proxy accounting is a third way to mark affiliation with an interlocutor's stance.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Timing and prosodic matching

So far the argument has been that claims of understanding, stance-congruent negative assessments and by-proxy justifications are all verbal devices for signalling affiliation with a teller's display of anger or indignation. Yet the timing of the turns that implement these actions and their prosodic formatting are not irrelevant to their affiliative import.

For instance, in (3) the affiliative expression of understanding (line 36) is produced with

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<sup>15</sup> The initial particles *well yes*, due to their prosodic delivery (rapid articulation, no stress or accent, no rhythmic break), do not constitute a possible turn-constructional unit or separate (agreeing) action of their own. For this reason, Lesley's *because* clause is hearable as providing a reason for what Joyce has said, not for her own agreement.

<sup>16</sup> Lesley's account is delivered with strongly affective prosody: high, sharp pitch peaks and syllable stretchings, which also make an affiliative *vocal* display of annoyance. For a discussion of prosodic means of displaying affiliation, see below.

<sup>17</sup> Further empathic techniques discussed by Heritage, *forthc.* (found not only in the reception of complaint stories) are 'parallel assessments' (*I love it*), 'subjunctive assessments' (*this sounds so good*) and 'observer responses' (*I wish I could have seen her face*).

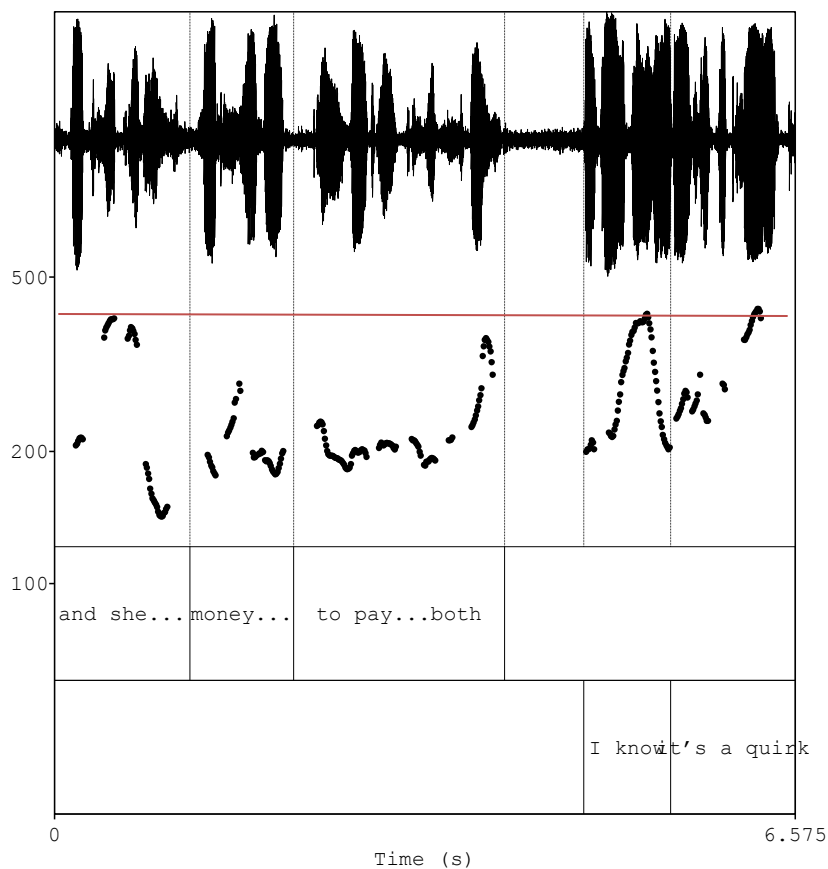
only minimal delay.<sup>18</sup> The stance-congruent negative assessments in lines 37-38 follow immediately. In (4) the by-proxy justification beginning in line 53 actually comes in overlap with the ongoing (but projectable) turn unit: its point of onset is carefully timed to come after Joyce has indicated that she rejected the request. By contrast, Bridget's agreeing but non-affiliative turn in line 100 of (2), *it is*, is produced after a 1.5 second delay. So prima facie, responding in a *timely* or even *early* fashion to a teller's display of anger or indignation is more supportive of that stance than responding with delay – and this by virtue of timing alone.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, the affiliative claims of understanding, stance-congruent assessments and by-proxy justifications in (3) and (4) are delivered with prosodic features which *match* or *upgrade* those of the prior affect-laden turn. In (3), for instance, Dinah produces high rising-falling peaks on *she* and *both* in line 35, and these are matched by similar peaks from Bea on *know* (line 36) and *quirk* (line 37). The intensity level of Dinah's climactic turn is increased in Bea's response to it. See **Figure 1**.

Two terms have been proposed in the interactional phonetic literature to describe such cases: (i) 'prosodic orientation' (Szczepek Reed 2006) and (ii) 'phonetic upgrading' (Ogden 2006). Whereas prosodic orientation refers most frequently to the *matching* of one or more prosodic features from a prior turn in a response to that turn and would account nicely for the pitch design of Bea's turn, 'phonetic upgrading' refers among other things to *increases*, e.g. in amplitude, in a second turn vis-à-vis a first and would seem a more appropriate label for the way intensity is handled in Bea's response (lines 37-38 of (3)).

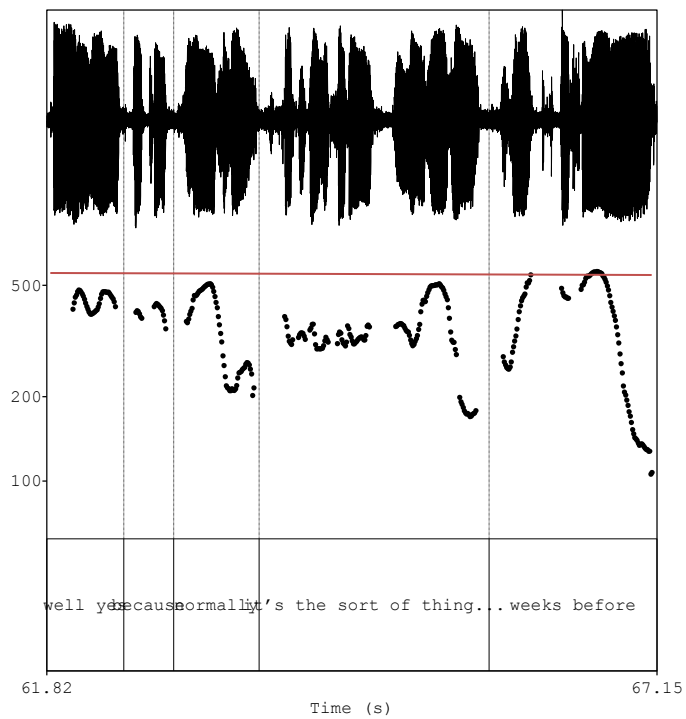
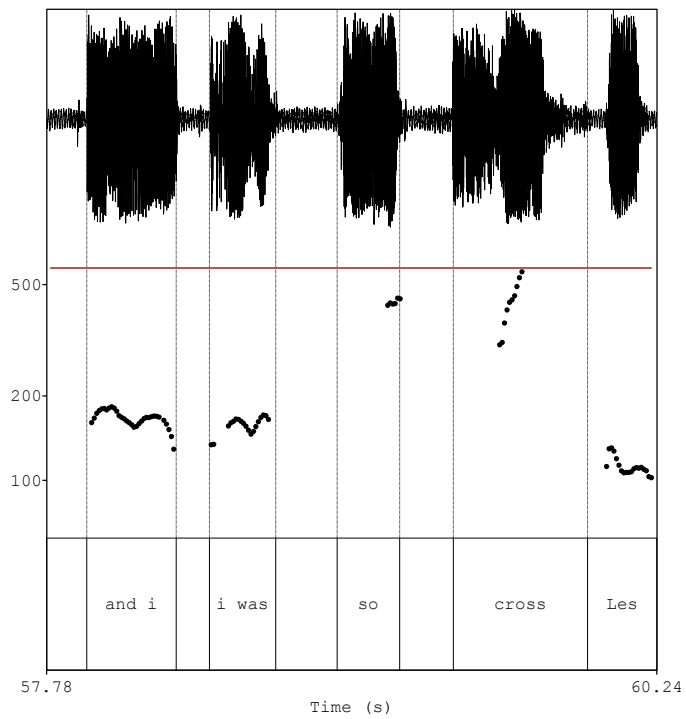
<sup>18</sup> The inbreath and micro-pause arguably embody an affective uptake of Dinah's hyperbolic climax.

<sup>19</sup> See also Goodwin & Goodwin (1987), who argue that assessments which are produced concurrently with the assessable are more strongly affiliative than ones which are produced afterwards, in next turn.



**Figure 1.** Waveform and pitch track for lines 35-37 in example (3)

Prosodic peak matching is also evident in Lesley's affiliative response to Joyce in example (4): Joyce reaches a peak of 500 Hz and more on *so cross* and Lesley produces similar 500 Hz peaks in her response. See the upper and lower box respectively of **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Wave forms and pitch tracks for lines 50 and 53f in example (4)

Prosodic matching and upgrading of this sort in responses to affect-laden displays of anger and indignation in complaint stories make small displays of congruent affect themselves: they signal vocally, i.e. non-verbally, that the recipient shares the stance conveyed in prior turn. And they do so precisely because they are not merely claiming understanding and affiliation with words, but are showing, or exhibiting it with the voice in ways which suggest that the affect is being experienced vicariously. This is perhaps the primordial form of expressing empathy.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Non-affiliative responses

#### 3.1 Verbal devices

What counts as a non-affiliative response to displays of anger or indignation in conversational complaint stories? Fragment (2), an instance of non-affiliative story reception, offers a number of instructive examples. For instance, following Jessica's enactment of her angry performance towards Andy on the telephone, *and I was all !hey:!* (line 56), Bridget does not respond with a sign of empathy but asks a factual follow-up question: *did you call him back?* (line 57).<sup>21</sup> This move addresses the sequence of events in the story (what happened next), but it does not deal with the storyteller's manifest stance towards the story events. As is evident from the way Jessica's narrative unfolds subsequently, Bridget's response is not perceived to be affiliative with the stance conveyed.

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<sup>20</sup> Prosodic matching is also considered a means for displaying empathy in mother-baby interactions, as described by Beebe et al (2003).

<sup>21</sup> In an independent study of resources for declining empathic moments, Heritage, forthc. calls this type of response an 'ancillary question' and points out that it simultaneously enforces a change of topic.

If factual follow-up questions lack affiliation because they do not engage empathically with the display of affect the teller has made, uncommitted minimal responses are just as non-affiliative. This can be seen from the following episode, where Shirley is telling her friend Geri about how a mutual friend Cathy, who is under the legal age for drinking, fenagled a strong rum-and-coke drink in the bar where Shirley was working.<sup>22</sup>

(5) **Shmucky kid** (Frankel, Geri & Shirley)

36 Shi: °hh so lAtEr on i walked out on the PATio;.  
 37 'n she was sitting OUT there with some friends of hers;  
 38 °hhh so (0.7) one of the uh BOUNcers cAme up to me=  
 39 =this NEW guy;  
 40 an\_he said °h tELL me he said do you KNOW that gIrl?  
 41 °h an\_i said SURE; (.)  
 42 i said you know I knOw her,  
 43 °h an\_he said WELL? (0.3)  
 44 h'said she's drinkin rUm\_n cOke out of a WATer glass;  
 45 (1.3)  
 46 Shi: he said NOW;  
 47 he said °h YOU decide what you do since she's yOur friend;  
 48 (0.7)  
 49 Shi: ((click)) °h so i WALKED up to cAthy;  
 50 an\_i said ^OH your drinking a cOke.  
 51 can i HAVE a sip?  
 52 (0.5)  
 53 Ger: hm\_mh,  
 54 Shi: ((click)) °h you KNOW;  
 55 ((click)) °h so i took a SIP of it;  
 56 (.)  
 57 Shi: °h <<f> !EIGHTY>> prOo:f!.  
 58 (.)  
 50→ Ger: °mh\_mh  
 60 Shi: =i couldn't beLIEVE it;=  
 61 =jimmy pOurs bacardi\_n\_CO:KE.  
 62 °h she had some GUY go get it for her,  
 63 ((click)) °h so i looked a'  
 64 i took the DRINK;  
 65 an\_i DRANK out of it; (.)  
 66 an\_i LOOKED at her.  
 67 (0.4)  
 68 Shi: ((click)) °h i said CAthy.  
 69 i said you must think the people who work here are rEally  
 STUpid.  
 70 (1.0)  
 71 Shi: you KNOW,

<sup>22</sup> This story is also discussed in Drew 1998.

72 (0.4)  
 73→ Ger: °YEAH°.  
 74 Shi: i said <<all> you don't> HONestly think;(.)  
 75 that we are all gonna just STAND here;  
 76 °h an\_watch you break the ^LA:W.  
 77 (0.4)  
 78 Shi: you KNO:W,  
 79 (0.4)

Shirley has introduced her story with the preface *Listen, something very very cute happened last night at the Warehouse* (not shown here), so as the story proceeds Geri is monitoring its progress for an event that would merit the label 'cute', used here ironically, at which point a recipient response will be relevant next. One of the first of these empathic moments comes at a point where the teller details how she discovered what Cathy was drinking: this moment is constructed as climactic through the high granularity of the description (*so I walked up to Cathy..., so I took a sip of it...*) and the dramatic formulation of the discovery, delivered with loud and sharply contoured prosody: *!eighty proof!*. Yet Geri's response is a barely audible *mh\_mh* (line 50).

That this response is perceived as lacking in affiliation can be seen from what Shirley does next. Like the storyteller in (2) above, she backs up to give an explanation (in this case of how Cathy was able to fenagle the drink) and then recycles the climax with even greater granularity (*I took the drink and I drank out of it and I looked at her*<sup>23</sup>). This produces another point at which a recipient response is relevant, whereupon, in the face of Geri's silence (line 70), the teller actually solicits a response but receives merely a bland *yeah* (line 73).

Shirley now reformulates and expands on the last story event and then adds another story component detailing how the bouncer came to support her and how she

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<sup>23</sup> Drew calls this kind of description *overdetermined* (1998:318).

morally upbraided Cathy (not shown here). This segment of the story also culminates in an affect-laden high point making a recipient response relevant next, but here too Shirley must solicit a comment from Geri (line 108), receiving only a non-committal *yeah* (line 110) in return:

**(5') Shmucky kid, cont'd**

99 Shi: °hh i said not only THA:T,  
 100 °h but the fACT remains that it IS against the law,  
 101 an\_that your JEOPardizing;  
 102 °hh NOT only jAck's lIquor license,  
 103 °hh but Also (.) his means of (.) of Income;  
 104 °h an\_everybody ELSE's means of income;  
 105 who WORKS here.  
 106 (0.4)  
 107 (S): ((click)) °hh  
 108 Shi: you KNOW,  
 109 (0.3)  
 110→ Ger: Y[E:AH; ]

Thus, repeatedly in this part of the storytelling episode, the recipient declines affect-laden empathic moments set up by the storyteller by producing only minimal responses and doing so only once they have been requested. This leads to the storyteller expanding the story even more, thereby creating more opportunities for affiliation.

Just as indicative of non-affiliation, if not more, is the withholding of any reaction at all when a recipient response has been made relevant during storytelling by a display of anger or indignation, be it reconstructed or in situ. This is what happens in the continuation of (5'):

**(5'') Shmucky kid, cont'd**

141 Shi: °h i TOLD hEr;  
 142 if you ever drink !ANY!thi:ng.  
 143 °h you are gonna g  
 144 don't \_WOrry.  
 145 ha\_ha\_ha  
 146 (.)  
 147 Ger: ((click)) Oy::°hh  
 148 Shi: <<h> such a !sh::mUcky KI:D!..>=you knO:w?



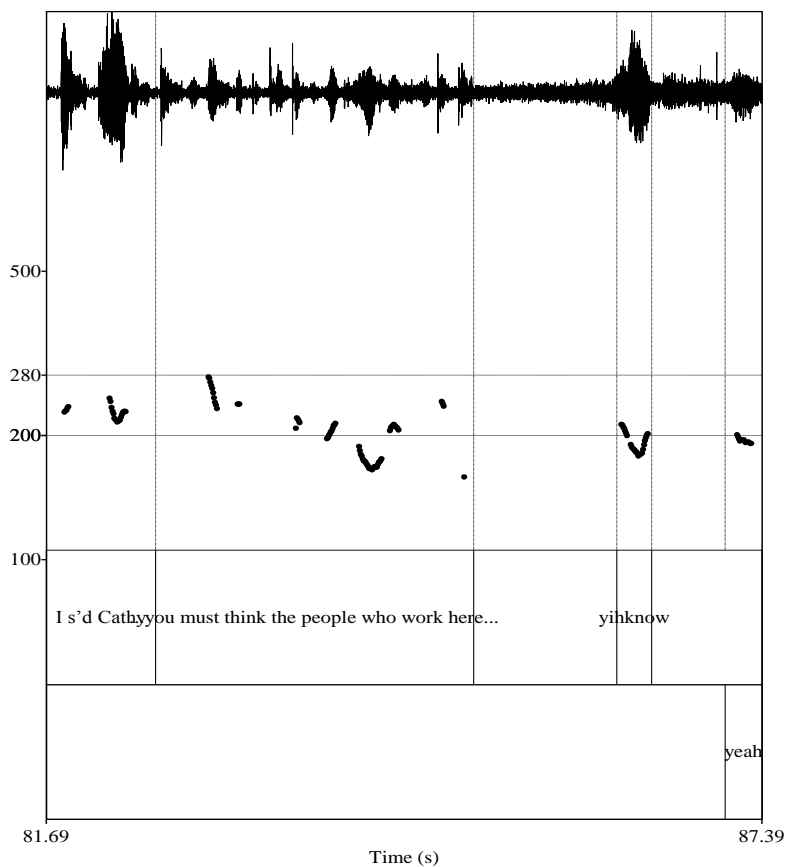
149→ (0.6)  
 150 Shi: °h <<h> i was really !AG!gravated.>  
 151→ (0.7)  
 152 Shi: ((click)) °h but ANYway;  
 153 i made a LOT of money last night;  
 154 <<p> so i'm happy about THAT;>  
 155 (1.0)  
 156 Shi: <<h> and that's all that's NEW->  
 157 (0.6)  
 158 Shi: oKAY?

At the conclusion of her story, Shirley delivers a high-pitched, affect-laden evaluation of Cathy the antagonist: *such a shmucky kid you know?* (line 148) but Geri withholds any response at all (line 149). When Shirley next formulates her affective stance towards the events explicitly, again with high pitch and heavy affect, *I was really !ag!gravated* (line 150), Geri once more passes the floor (line 151). In the light of these non-affiliative responses, it is hardly surprising that the teller now re-casts her story as having a bright side to it (line 153f) and closes down the episode shortly thereafter.

### 3.2 Delays and prosodic downgrading

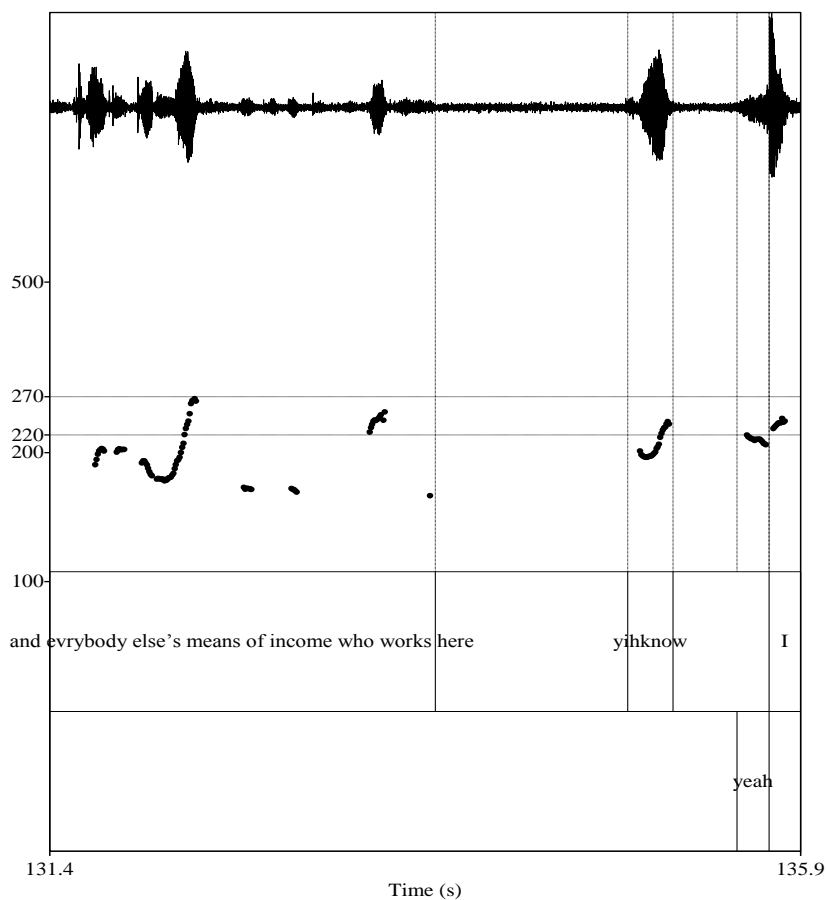
Factual follow-up questions, minimal responses and withholdings all owe their non-affiliative import to the fact that they ignore the affect or stance displayed in a prior turn and its relevancies for an empathic response. Non-affiliative minimal responses are also typically delayed and prosodically downgraded vis-à-vis the prior turn. This exhibits on a purely vocal level that the recipient is not endorsing the stance conveyed. For instance, in (5) and (5') delays are evident before and after the storyteller's pursuit of response (lines 71 and 108, respectively). In addition, Geri's *yeah* tokens on these two occasions do not

match, much less upgrade the pitch peaks of Shirley's prior turns and come off as breathy and weak compared to the storyteller's intensity and voice quality. See **Figures 3 & 4**.<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 3.** Waveform and pitch track for lines 68-73 of example (5)

<sup>24</sup> In these figures the weak production of Geri's *yeah*'s is apparent in the reduced vertical extension of the wave form as compared to that of Shirley's prior *you know*'s. Breathiness does not show up in these diagrams.



**Figure 4.** Wave form and pitch track for lines 104-110 in fragment (5')

Summarizing the discussion so far, we have seen that claims of understanding, stance-congruent negative assessments and by-proxy justifications are used in responding affiliatively to displays of anger and indignation in complaint stories, while factual follow-up questions, minimal responses and withholdings are found in non-affiliative responses. The affiliative devices are deployed as a rule with timely or early onsets and prosodic matching or upgrading, while the non-affiliative forms, especially minimal responses, have delayed onsets and are prosodically downgraded. Yet not all verbal forms used to respond to affect displays in complaint stories are as unambiguously affiliative or

non-affiliative as these. Some are intrinsically ambivalent as to whether they are marking affiliation or not. This is the case of response cries and sound objects.

#### 4. Verbally ambivalent responses and prosody

The term *response cry* was first introduced by Goffman (1978) to refer to forms such as *brr!*, *oops!*, *eeuw!*, *ouch!*, *wheee!* etc., which are commonly thought of as ‘blurted out’ on occasions when the self undergoes some untoward event. Goffman argues, however, that response cries are produced in social gatherings and consequently strategically selected for the particular occasion on which they occur. The forms Goffman describes are typically ritualized and often have a standard orthographic representation, although they lack lexical meaning. For this reason, he refers to them as ‘semi-words’ (1978: 810).

Yet response cries are not the only non-lexical vocalizations encountered in everyday interaction. A perusal of Jefferson’s transcripts, for instance, reveals any number of other vocal sounds and noises<sup>25</sup> – some partly conventionalized, others much less so – including *.t*, *.p*, *.tch*, *oo*, *wuhh*, *clok*, *klk*, *hhrhh*, *.plhhp*, *.p.lak*, *phhh.gnk*, *.tl*.<sup>26</sup> A number of these, for instance *.t*, *.p* and *.tch*, which represent clicks, have been shown to be recurrent and systematic in specific sequential environments (Wright 2005, 2007; Reber 2008). The term *sound object* is used here to refer to this larger set of sounds and vocalizations (Reber & Couper-Kuhlen 2010).

As Heritage (forthc.) points out, response cries and the like are ambivalent markers of empathy. In the case of sound objects, this may be due to their non-word status. Lacking full word status, they also lack referential meaning and consequently are

<sup>25</sup> *Vocal* is used here in the sense of ‘made with the speech apparatus’.

<sup>26</sup> This list is not exhaustive and *excludes* the sounds made in laughing and crying. See also Ward 2006 for another list of non-lexical sounds encountered in English conversation.

not accountable in the same way as words are. Response cries, and sound objects more generally – especially if they are sonorant<sup>27</sup> – do, however, carry prosody and this makes them particularly effective in signalling emotive stances (Goodwin & Goodwin 2000).

To see how response cries and sound objects work in complaint stories, let us examine the continuation of example (4), shown in (6) below. In this fragment Lesley is now telling her friend Joyce about how Nancy, after learning that Joyce could not help out at the charity event, then called up Lesley to ask for help:

**(6) “Supply person” (Holt Oct 1988:1:8)**

74 Les: and ↑then she rAng me UP;  
 75 and said that (.) J:OYCE suggested that I [normally] (hel)  
 76→ Joy: [AHHH:::::]  
 77 Les: ↑huh[hah huuh↑  
 78→ Joy: [OHHH:::::..  
 79 Les: huhuhu °hh [↑so ] I sAid um- ((click))°h  
 80 Joy: [( )]  
 81 Les: well i'm sOrr[y i'm ] TEACHing;  
 82 Joy: [( )]  
 83 Les: she said °hh  
 84 <<hh> OH::; (.)  
 85 ↑Oh my dEar;  
 86 well how lOvely that you're invOLved in ↑↑TEACHing;>  
 87 a[nd ↓I: thOught; °h  
 88 Joy: [ohh:  
 89 Les: <<h> ↑well al↑RIGHT then,>  
 90 perhaps i'd like to suggest <<☺> ↑↑YOU for the nExt  
 supply pe(h)ers[ (h)on;>=  
 91→ Joy: [UH::[::h heh ]  
 92 Les: =[heh uh heh uh heh uh huh]

Lesley's point in this story continuation is that Nancy's excuse for calling Lesley was that Joyce had suggested it, this constituting another instance of reprehensible behaviour on

<sup>27</sup> *Sonorant* sounds are ones produced with a relatively free flow of air through the oral and/or nasal tract. They are typically voiced.

Nancy's part.<sup>28</sup> In line 75 Lesley's negative stance towards Nancy's manipulation is conveyed phonetically by a lengthening of the initial consonant on *Joyce*<sup>29</sup> and prosodically through a pronounced rise-fall contour. Joyce now expresses her congruent negative stance by producing two affiliative response cries *ahhh::::* and *ohhh::::::* in overlap with Lesley's turn as it dissolves into laughter. The second of these response cries is somewhat more prominent and is pitched at roughly the same level as Lesley's *Joyce*. It is stretched to be co-extensive with Lesley's laughter but once in the clear, slowly glides downward. This response cry then is carefully calibrated to 'fit' Lesley's affect-laden turn: it is produced concurrently and done in a way which matches the pitch and timing of the turn it is responsive to.

By way of evaluation, Lesley now reports what she thought to herself in response to Nancy, whose expressed enthusiasm over teaching (lines 85-86) Lesley treats as overdone and insincere: *Well alright then perhaps I'd like to suggest YOU for the next supply person* (lines 89-90). Joyce again responds with an affiliative vocalization *UH::::h* (line 91), this time one which matches the pitch of Lesley's focal accent on *you* but upgrades the overall loudness of her turn. (See **Figure 5**, where the dotted line marks the peak of Lesley's *you* and that of Joyce's *uh::::h*.) Although *uh::::h* is not a conventionalized response cry (it would qualify here as a sound object), it serves the purpose of allowing Joyce to convey strong vocal affiliation with Lesley's stance.

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<sup>28</sup> In addition, Lesley's turn may contain an element of potential criticism of Joyce for having suggested that Nancy call Lesley in the first place (p.c., Paul Drew).

<sup>29</sup> Or more precisely on the first consonant of the non-anonymized name. See Kohler & Niebuhr 2007 for a phonetic study of this phenomenon in German.



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35   TRI:                [O::H::;
36→  BRI:  ↑↓o | [H::;
37→  TRI:    | [↑↓MM::;
           | ((brief exchange of glances between Bridget and Tricia))

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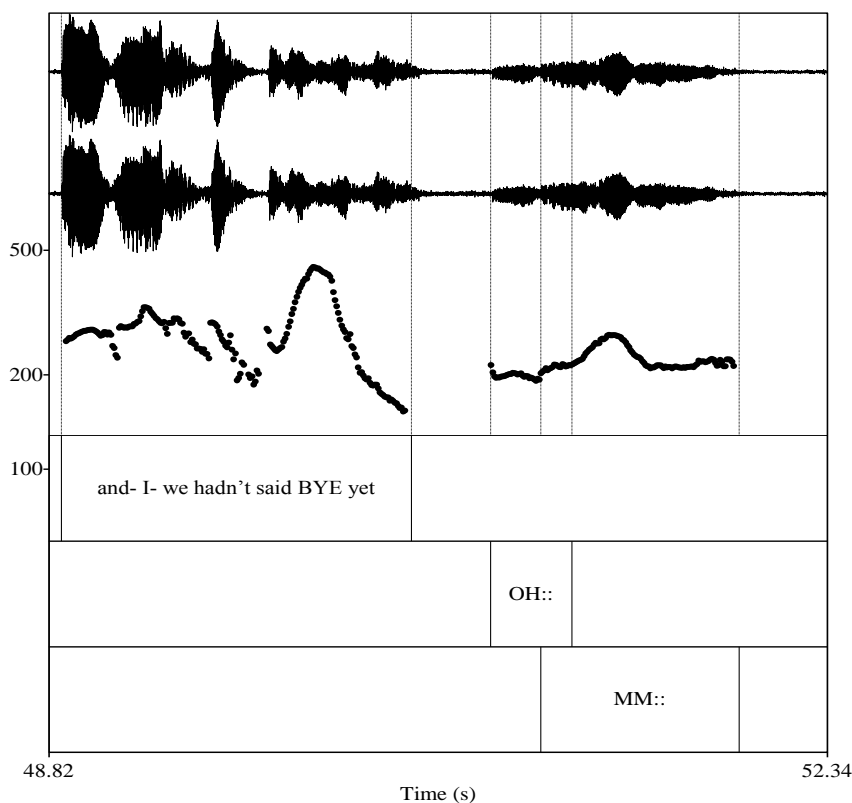
Recall that the response tokens which Bridget and Tricia produce after the climax of Jessica's story (line 32) and the clarification of her point (line 34) are treated by the teller as lacking in affiliation: rather than initiating a round of affect-laden evaluations, Jessica begins to explain prosaically why the event which constitutes the climax of her story is a departure from the norm, or in other words why her story is tellable.

The fact that Bridget's and Tricia's responses (lines 35-37) come off as non-affiliative is due in large part to the way they are produced. In terms of timing, Tricia's first *O::H:* (line 35), delivered in overlap with line 34, is a delayed reaction to the climax in line 32.<sup>30</sup> The next responses, Bridget's *OH::* and Tricia's partially overlapping *MM::* (lines 36-37), are even more delayed vis-à-vis the climax in line 32: they come only once the teller has elaborated the point (line 34). Moreover, although both *OH::* and *MM::* are delivered with pitch contours which echo the strong rise-fall of Jessica's *BYE:* in line 34, these contours are significantly lower and flatter in pitch and also quieter in volume: See **Figure 6**.

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<sup>30</sup> Its timing precludes its being heard as a concurrent assessment of line 34.





**Figure 6.** Waveform and pitch track of lines 34-37 in example (2)

Coinciding with the brief exchange of glances between Bridget and Tricia, which suggests an element of collusion (M. Goodwin, 1990), this prosodic downgrading contributes to a lack of displayed affiliation and arguably accounts for why the storytelling episode subsequently develops the way it does.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to the verbal devices examined in earlier sections of this chapter for doing affiliation – claims of understanding, congruent negative assessments and by-

<sup>31</sup> Another instance of a prosodically downgraded response cry can be found in the *oy* produced by Geri in line 147 of fragment (5'). It does not match the pitch peaks in Shirley's prior turn (lines 141-145) and is significantly softer and weaker in articulation. Not surprisingly, it is also treated by the storyteller as lacking in affiliation.

proxy justifications – the response cries and sound objects considered in this section, *ahhh:::*, *ohhh:::*, *uh:::*, *oh::* and *mm::*, are more heavily dependent for their affective value on prosodic realization. Their affiliative or non-affiliative import depends crucially on how their timing, pitch and/or loudness relate/s to that of the prior turn. In cases of prosodic matching and/or upgrading, the affective value of these response cries and sound objects is affiliative; where prosodic matching or upgrading is lacking, their affective value also lacks in affiliation.

### 5. Response cries and verbal reinforcement

If response cries and sound objects are inherently ambivalent means of affiliating, their import being largely dependent on how they are delivered prosodically in relation to the turn they are responding to, they are also inherently less accountable than words. This means that their effect vanishes relatively quickly if they are not followed up by some type of lexical reinforcement. It is arguably for this reason that a verbally more explicit indication of the recipient's stance typically follows a purely vocal display of affiliation.

To see this, let us return briefly to example (1):

#### (1) “Something for nothing” (excerpt)

32 Les: And uh ↑we were lOoking round the ↓STA:LLS;  
 33 and poking aBOUT;  
 34 and hE came UP to me,  
 35 and he said;  
 36 Oh:, <<aspirated> H>ELlo lEsley, (.)  
 37 <<h> stIll trying to bUy something for NOTHING,>  
 38 Joy: ((click)) °HAH:::  
 39 (0.8)  
 40 Joy: OO[:: (lesley) ]  
 41 Les: [↑OO: ehH heh ↑heh]  
 42 (0.2)  
 43 Joy: ↓i:s [n't ] [↓he  
 44 Les: <<f,h> [↑what] dO ↑Y[ou !↑SA:Y!..>  
 45 (0.3)  
 46→ Joy: <<p> ↓oh isn't hE ↓DREA:Dful;>  
 47 Les: <<pp, h> YE:S,>

48           (0.6)  
 49   ( ): <<p> ((click))>  
 50→ Joy: what\_n AW::ful MA::[N;]  
 51   Les:                                 [eh ] heh heh ↑heh  
 52→ Joy: OH:: hOnestly;  
 53→           I cannot stAnd the mAn;

Recall that on completion of Lesley's story in line 37, Joyce produces first a sound object in the form of a click and an audible, prolonged inbreath (line 38). Then a split second later she delivers another sound object, represented here as *oo::*, followed by the vocative *Lesley*. Importantly, these sound objects are not left to stand on their own. Instead, following a brief pause, the story recipient moves to 'put into words' the stance she has been displaying vocally: in line 43 she begins with *i:sn't he* and at the next opportunity recycles this to *oh i:sn't he drea:dful* (line 46). In her next turns two more, differently worded negative assessments follow: *what\_n aw::ful ma::n* (line 50) and *oh:: honestly; I cannot stand the man* (lines 52-3). So following her 'spontaneous' reaction to the climax of Lesley's story, achieved non-lexically through sound objects, Joyce takes every opportunity offered thereafter to reinforce her stance verbally.

It is thus the *combination* of sound object + verbal reinforcement that leads to the story reception in (1) coming off as affiliative.<sup>32</sup> Response cries and sound objects which are left to stand on their own run the risk of losing their affiliative import in the

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<sup>32</sup> A further example of response cry + lexical reinforcement can be found in the story segment preceding fragment (5): Geri responds quite empathically (but as it turns out prematurely) to a candidate climactic moment in Shirley's story by producing a click followed immediately by a more substantive, affect-laden remark supportive of the teller's (perceived) stance:

**Shmucky kid** (Frankel, Geri & Shirley)

20 Shi: °hh so she cAme in and she starts asking me if I'd seen GArY.  
 21           gary KLEI:N;  
 22           (.)  
 23           °h I said YEAH he is here tonight;  
 24           °h she said <<h> well would you go FIND him please>=  
 25           ='n tell him to give me my TEN dollars that he owes me;  
 26           (.) °h[hh                                 ]  
 27 Ger:           [ ((click)) WHAT do you] have to get [in on that] fO[r; ]

aftermath. This is what happens in the following fragment, where Norma has been complaining to her friend Bea on the telephone about a painter she hired to fix up her bathroom. She prefaces her first complaint story with *I'm so ma:d at that (0.2) p:ainter;* (not shown here). The second complaint story, which concerns her bathroom cabinet, goes as follows:

**(7) “Medicine cabinet” (SBL 2:1:8:R)**

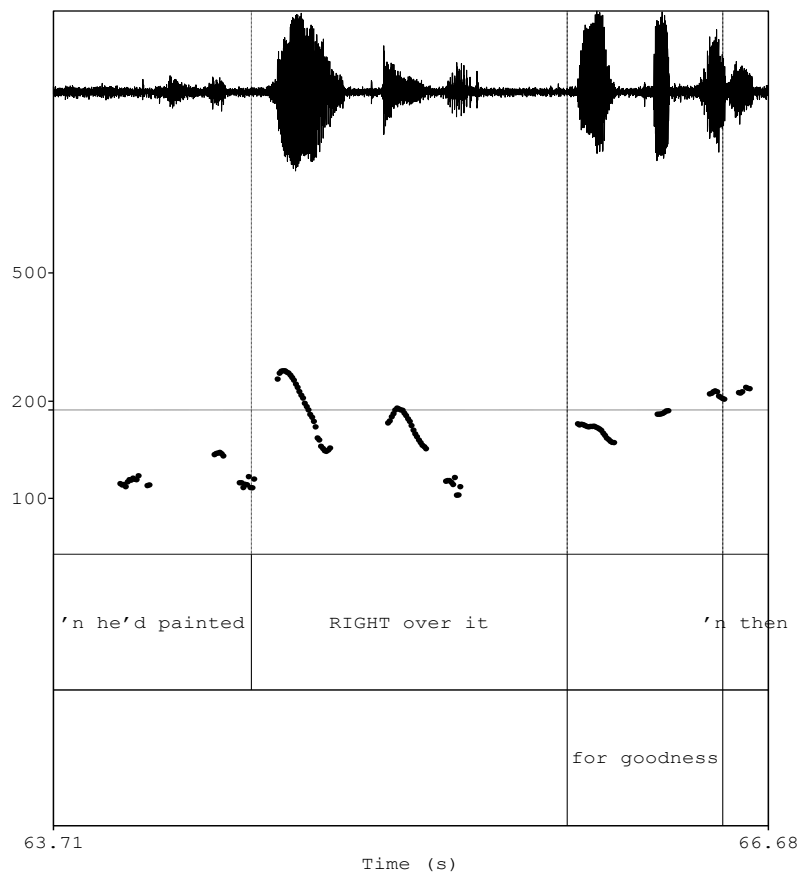
24 Nor: an\_then (.) this morning i got mad aGAIN,  
 25 becuz i GOT up; °hh  
 26 and was TRYing to saw the Edge;=  
 27 =i thought MAYbe it was: uh:: (.) stUck;  
 28 (1.2)  
 29 Nor: uhm::  
 30 (0.6)  
 31 Nor: rubbing at the TO:P.  
 32 Bea: YE:S.  
 33 Nor: so i had my little case\_n i was\_n i was UP there,  
 34 sawing aWAY,  
 35 and i discOvered that °hh  
 36 I: had a pIece of this: uh: (0.7) °h SHELF paper;(.)  
 37 stUck on the tOp of that (0.7) uh: ↑MEDicine chest-  
 38 and he'd painted right Over it.  
 39 (0.3)  
 40→ Bea: Oh [f: ]  
 41 Nor: [and the] little Edge had curled Up\_n was showing RE:D.  
 42 (0.4)  
 43→ Bea: [oh for goodn ]  
 44 Nor: [and i thought gEez whiz] what's THI:S;  
 45 (0.3)  
 46 Bea: ah\_h[a ]  
 47 Nor: [and\_i] (.) rEached out TOWARD it,  
 48 an\_he'd pAinted <<f> ↑RI:GHT> Over it.  
 49 (0.3)  
 50→ Bea: for gOodness [xxx] ]  
 51 Nor: [an\_he pUt]uh he mO:ved a LA:TCH,  
 52 uh:: so i can't lATCH my DOO::R,  
 53→ (1.4)  
 54 Nor: a::nd uh  
 55→ (1.2)  
 56 Nor: well he's coming BA:CK;  
 57 n i'm gonna tEll him i: had unkInd THOUGHTS about him.  
 58 (.)  
 59→ Bea: uh\_huh\_huh\_huh °h\_°h yes°;  
 60 (0.6)  
 61 Nor: SO[: uh[i've b]een: (.) fUssing with THA:T.

62 Bea: [°h [well ]  
 63 Bea: <<ff> It'll get strAightened OUT;>  
 64 (0.2)  
 65 Nor: ah:\_HA: ,  
 66 (0.4)  
 67 Bea: ↑dOn't get up↓SET about it.

On completion of Norma's first climactic line *and he'd painted right over it* (line 38), Bea begins a response cry *oh: f:-*,<sup>33</sup> which however she discontinues when Norma rather unexpectedly adds on another climactic line: *and the little edge had curled up'n was showing re:d* (line 41). Once again Bea launches a response cry: *oh for good-*, cut off when Norma again goes on, now animating the climactic moment when she discovered the painter's transgression: *and I thought geez whiz what's thi:s* (line 44). The last rendition of the climax *and I(.) reached out toward it, n\_he'd painted ri:ght over it* (lines 47-48) is dramatic and delivered with prosodic marks of heightened affect: sudden loudness and high, sharp pitch peaks. See **Figure 7**.

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<sup>33</sup> This is projectably *oh for goodness sake*: see lines 43 and 50.



**Figure 7.** Waveform and pitch track for lines 48-50 in example (7)

Pursuant to Norma's display of indignation in line 48, Bea's response cry in line 50 is pitched at a level which approximates the height of Norma's final pitch accent: See the dotted line in **Figure 7**, which passes through the peak of Norma's *over* and that of Bea's *good-*.

Yet when Norma proceeds to extend her complaint to include another of the painter's transgressions (lines 51-52), Bea does not take the next opportunity to lexically reinforce the vocal stance she displayed earlier. Instead she withholds a response in line 53 and again in line 55. Norma next delivers a here-and-now evaluation of her story

(lines 56-57), but Bea again passes up the chance to make an affiliative stance verbally explicit. Instead, she merely produces a string of inarticulate laugh particles (line 59).

The withholding of verbally articulated responses as a follow-up to purely vocal response cries ultimately leads to less than affiliative story reception in fragment (7). Evidence for the perceived lack of affiliation is to be found in what happens next: the storyteller now moves to close the episode, playing down the anger reconstructed and displayed earlier in her story and downgrading it to something trivial that she has been *fussing with* (line 61). The story recipient optimistically projects the situation will get *straightened out* (line 63) and advises the teller not to get *upset* about it (line 67). Rather than empathize with the indignation which Norma has been displaying, Bea's subsequent turns effectively sanction it and convert the complaint into an occasion for advice-giving.<sup>34</sup>

Verbal reinforcement of a stance displayed initially with vocal means only is important for another reason. It can obviate the need for prosodic matching or upgrading on these more substantive turns altogether. This will be seen by taking a closer look at fragment (1) again:

**(1) “Something for nothing” (excerpt)**

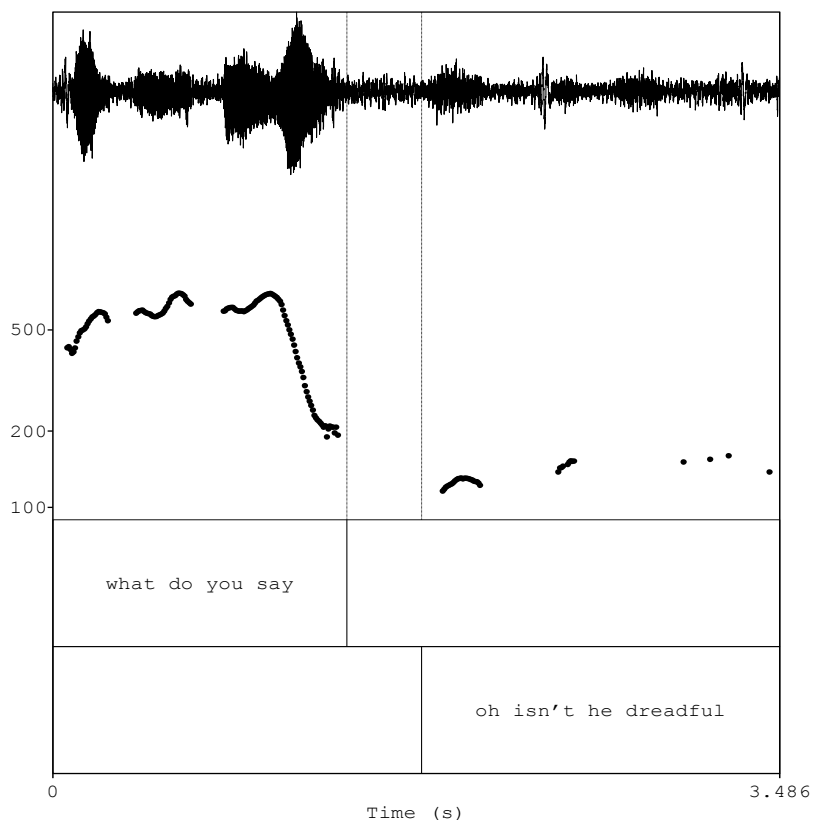
32 Les: AND uh ↑we were looking rou-nd the ↓sta:lls;  
 33 'n poking about 'n he came up to me 'n he said -  
 34 oh: hhello lEsley, (.)  
 35 ↑still trying to buy something for nothing;  
 36 Joy: tch!.hh[hahhhhhh!  
 37 (0.8)  
 38 Joy: oo[: : :]: l e s l e y;]  
 39→ Les: [↑oo:..]ehh heh ↑heh ]  
 40 (0.2)  
 41→ Joy: ↓i:s[n ' t] [↓he  
 42→ Les: [↑what]do ↑y[ou ↑sa↓:y.  
 43 (0.3)

<sup>34</sup> This is reminiscent of the convergence between troubles telling episodes and service encounters as described by Jefferson and Lee 1981.

44→ Joy: ↓oh isn't he ↓drea:dful.  
 45 Les: °ye-:-:s:°  
 46 (0.6)  
 47 ( ): tch  
 48→ Joy: wha't'n aw::ful ma::[::n;  
 49 Les: [ehh heh-heh-↑heh  
 50→ Joy: oh:: honestly;  
 51→ ↓i cannot stand the ma\_n;  
 52 it's just (??[:

Focussing on lines 39 & 41 and 42 & 44, it will be seen that the story recipient does not prosodically match or upgrade the storyteller's prior turn on these occasions. On the contrary: while Lesley uses exceptionally high pitches in her evaluative turns, Joyce shifts to low pitches in her responses. This is particularly clear in lines 42 & 44: see

**Figure 8.**



**Figure 8.** Wave form and pitch track for lines 42-44 in fragment (1)



Joyce's prosody here is diametrically opposed to Lesley's, both in terms of intensity and of pitch.<sup>35</sup> Yet her turn does not come off as lacking in affiliation. Rather, because it is a lexically explicit negative assessment of the antagonist that is congruent with the stance Lesley has displayed, Joyce is perceived to be endorsing this stance, although from a different perspective. All three of Joyce's congruent negative assessments (lines 44, 48 and 50-51) depart noticeably from the prosody Lesley is using in prior turns, yet as can be seen from the story trajectory, there is no question but that her story reception is perceived to be affiliative.<sup>36</sup>

Cases like that shown in Figure 8 provide a useful corrective to the description given thus far of affiliating vs. non-affiliating responses to displays of anger and indignation in conversational complaint stories. While congruent negative assessments have been seen to be verbally affiliative and to be *typically* done with prosodic matching or upgrading, it is not the case that their affiliative import depends *exclusively* on the latter. Instead, depending on the confluence of situational and contextual factors, congruent negative assessments can display verbal affiliation without prosodic matching or upgrading.<sup>37</sup> Yet when the means deployed in responding are verbally inexplicit, as in response cries and sound objects, the details of prosodic delivery appear to be crucial for determining presence vs. absence of a story recipient's affiliation. Here the degree of empathy is displayed quite primordially through 'crying out' with the other or not.

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<sup>35</sup> In this sense it may be another form of prosodic orientation, called 'non-matching-' by Szczepek Reed (2006:57).

<sup>36</sup> The asymmetry of pitch deployment here may relate to the fact that Joyce is evaluating an experience to which only Lesley has 'entitlement' (see Couper-Kuhlen, *forthc.* b).

<sup>37</sup> Initial observations suggest that this may happen especially when the recipient does not share entitlement to the experience but is presenting their (congruent) stance from an independent perspective (see Couper-Kuhlen, *forthc.* b).

The affiliative import of prosodic matching/upgrading is short-lived. Without some verbal reinforcement it is likely to vanish as talk progresses. In this respect, like head nods, which are insufficient markers of affiliation at story completion, so response cries and sound objects with prosodic matching and/or upgrading, although they may be effective in the moment, are less apt, without the reinforcement of words, to convey lasting affiliation as the storytelling episode unfolds.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study began by examining verbal and vocal means for conveying affiliation in response to displays of anger and indignation in conversational complaint stories and contrasted them with verbal and vocal means for displaying non-affiliation. Initially there appeared to be a correspondence between verbal affiliation and prosodic matching or upgrading vs. verbal non-affiliation and prosodic downgrading. With response cries and sound objects, the contribution of prosodic formatting to the display of affiliation vs. non-affiliation was shown to be even more crucial. However, purely vocal affiliative displays are as a rule reinforced verbally in following turns, suggesting that they may be perceived as momentary and fleeting. Participants who wish to show affiliation and to go on record as showing affiliation will as a rule choose a combination of response cry and verbal reinforcement.

Finally, it was seen on at least one occasion that a verbal device for conveying affiliation, the congruent negative assessment, need not have matching or upgraded prosody at all to come off as affiliative. The reasons for this would repay closer study. For the moment suffice it to note that conversational complaint stories typically involve

affects related to anger and indignation brought about by a third party's reprehensible behavior towards the storyteller. Prosodic matching, however, can only be expected to the extent that affects are 'shared' by teller and recipient, and share-ability depends ultimately on whether participants have the same "entitlement to experience" (Sacks 1992/1995: 242).<sup>38</sup>

In conclusion, this study has attempted to show how displays of affiliation, or empathy, are *achieved* in the reception of conversational complaint stories. These displays are not randomly placed but instead made relevant by the storyteller at precise moments in the storytelling episode. At such moments tellers monitor closely how their story so far and its affective dimension are being received. Story recipients make carefully timed displays of empathy (or not) through the deployment of a range of verbal, vocal and embodied resources, whose affective import is not inherently given but derives from the way they are 'fitted' (or not) to the local context. 'Fittedness' takes on especially concrete dimensions in the case of the voice, where pitch, loudness, voice quality and other prosodic/phonetic characteristics of the response can match/upgrade those of a prior turn or not. Voice in displaying affective stance is not a spontaneous expression of some inner state but rather a carefully deployed and manipulated resource, used in complex interaction with verbal and other non-verbal resources. All in all, reception in conversational complaint stories serves as a further instantiation of Sacks' "order at all points" (1992/1995: 484).

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<sup>38</sup> See Heritage, *forthc.* for a study of how asymmetric rights to experience make the display of empathy a delicate matter, and Couper-Kuhlen, *forthc. b* for a discussion of how entitlement to experience affects the vocal dimensions of empathic recipient responses in storytelling.

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